

“Studying History, Making History”

Starla

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As someone who has spent her entire learning life in public schools, from a public elementary school in Oklahoma to a public University in Colorado, my career has been a multidimensional experience based on dynamic inquiry. Unlike many, I never really thought of my schools as limiting or controlling. Yet the same institutions that gave me so much vigorous opportunity sadly possess a nationalistic underbelly, a contradictory and conformist core.

When I went to college to study history, I didn't realize I'd soon be making history.

But, somewhere during my initial search for understanding, a new administration seized the white house and initiated wars in distant lands. During this international chaos, my university burst with demonstrations for and against the war. Professors queried students freely concerning what they thought of the war and the present administration. Then, out of nowhere, the government implemented the Patriot Act, and things really heated up.

Nationwide, conservatives grabbed the opportunity to lobby against the voices of progressive, liberal, radical, or activist college professors and to stop public schools from harboring free thinkers. I witnessed this assault at the University of Colorado when the CU business school found a way to hire or fire on the grounds of political affiliation. This method began when the campus Republicans (aka the campus nazis) complained about the number of “liberal” professors in the business school. The campus Republicans accused their liberal professors of giving them poor grades as a result of these students' political affiliation. This slippery slope caused the Dean of the business school to ensure an equal count of Republicans and Democrats on his staff. Does the Dean of the business school know that these two parties are virtually the same when it comes to corporate capitalism?

This new method is appearing all over the country in public colleges and Universities, and not surprisingly, on state Senate floors. Due to right-wing sentiment that liberals are taking over the schools, the state of Georgia adopted the Academic Bill of Rights Resolution, which calls for more conservatism in the classroom. Also, since the passage of the Patriot Act, many professors have been accused of being “terrorists” (a term equivalent to being anti-war and dissident). These accusations have caused some professors to be fired; or worse, it has caused professors to silence themselves due to fear.

During my first year, a lively antiwar movement swept the campus. On a brisk Colorado autumn day, I left the Humanities building for some lunch. As I approached the student center, a very nice but upset looking woman handed me a piece of propaganda on why we should hate George W. Bush, and on the back was a listing of ten good reasons to protest the war in Iraq. I knew that these protesters were right and that I would need to help them. That day, I held a sign with the huge crowd and listened tearfully to what was said. I didn't go to the rest of my classes that afternoon.

As the school year progressed, I watched the university transform from a place of learning primarily about information in books to a place of social discourse, dissent, and debate. The campus was now as catalytic to thought and insight as was the classroom.

Some of my fondest memories of that year are of the demonstrations that I witnessed and participated in. I rioted in the University Memorial Center with other students against the war. The riot started when the police

took out their night sticks and pepper spray. Many were arrested, and that act of civil disobedience surely became an opportunity for the whole student body to assess where they stood on the war. At the end of the year, a large group set up a shanty town in the middle of campus. Vocal and visible, no one could ignore the problems of the war and the protesters. Most people on campus had to walk through this shanty town on their way to class.

My first year of college kept me awake and aware. Comrades were everywhere, and I thought it would be nearly impossible to find people who supported war in Iraq. Sadly, different lessons came during my second year. As the protests and anti-war discourse slowed down, the entire school seemed to silence. Professors feared for their jobs. Peers from foreign countries were afraid to speak out for fear of deportation. This stagnation of free thought served as an open door for all sorts of scams by the campus Republicans and their cohorts. This taught me that I cannot always count on The Force to be with me, and that in fact, the world will not always be a warm and fuzzy group of sentimental activists ready to protest the government that oppresses them. Why? Fear is the only reason I can think of. Learning to combat this fear can only come through solidarity with others.

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